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Bearing the load

Detente took a step forward last week when these bears from the Soviet Union took some time out to help with the construction of the Washington, D.C., subway. The animals are with a Soviet circus currently performing in the U.S. capital.

Forced underground

Workers' film now on screen

By WOJTEK GWIAZDA
of The Gazette

A controversial film forced underground five years ago has surfaced and is being shown at the Videographe each night until Friday.

Dealing with Quebec's textile industry, On est au coton is an important film in the evolution of Quebec cinema. It is being shown publically for the first time, and its language is Quebecois.

After repeated attempts to "improve" and delete certain sections, the film was sentenced to die in the National Film Board archives by then-NFB commissioner Sidney Newman in 1971, saying "It will never be released . . . It's a dead film."

Luckily, "someone" somehow had a copy of the film, and video copies were made and shown in kitchens and at meetings — despite police raids.

The film went underground until these free Videographe showings.

ENEMIES

Made six years ago by director Denys Arcand — whose best-known films include Quebec: Duplessis et apres, and Rejeanne Padovani — and a team from the NFB, the movie made many enemies because of its attempt to present the situation of the textile workers in Quebec.

Filmed with the cooperation of both the NFB and the Canadian Institute of Textiles, which permitted the film unit access to both factories and management offices, On est au coton primarily gives the workers a voice in describing the industry.

As one critic of the time wrote: "One can see that the great 'flaw' of Denys Arcand's film . . . is that it has given the workers a say too often." It shows the life these workers were leading was not the one they wanted to lead.

"This was, one can easily understand, the unpardonable mistake," the critic added.

Sidney Newman had originally liked the film, but complaints about it made him question its "authenticity" and "exactness".

According to Newman the film contained inaccuracies as to textile industry wages in Quebec and the U.S. and gave the impression that the Quebec industry was controlled primarily from outside the province. Newman said this was untrue.

SHOCKED

Members of the Canadian Textile Institute, after viewing the original film in early 1970, advised its council and some company directors that "every possible legal means" should be taken to prevent the release of the film.

Edward F. King, the head of Dominion Textiles, was "shocked" by the content of the film based, according to him, on the class struggle.

At one point in the film, Madeleine Parent, a well known unionist describes how Dominion Textiles used trucks of "steel" to transport "scabs" from their homes to the factory in order to break a strike in the 40s.

Besides being shocked by the film, King demanded — and was granted — the deletion of his participation in the film. There were other deletions made because of the retroactive nature of the War Measures Act, but the film remains a three hour monument to the desire to dissect the industry from A to Z.

Some observers have pointed out the film is not objective.

Made up mostly of workers talking about their work, it shows the resignation of most of these people and not the "silent revolt" that Arcand expected to find in the "infernal factories" and in an industry where the unions had, he believed, an "appalling history."

NUMBING

Made in '68-'69, On est au coton provides many insights into the textile industry.

One of the first sequences shows a woman at a sewing machine swaying rhythmically as she works, just like the machines all around her. The noise, the immensity of the factories at first is shocking and then numbing.

The workers punch in in the morning and punch out in the afternoon. The machines go home, sleep, dream about the whirring sounds and start again.

The woman who began work at 13 years of age tells the camera her dreams; the mechanic recounts how he rose through the ranks of the factory.

One of the most surprising sequences shows an economist explaining the multinational corporation that controlled many textile mills. Using a gigantic chart he shows all the interconnecting companies and as the camera pulls out we see that he's lecturing to the mechanic who can only read: "Extraordinaire."

Menuhin impressive as ever

By JACOB SISKIND
of The Gazette

It is over fifty years now that Yehudi Menuhin has been playing the violin before enthusiastic audiences — and all of that time his name has had a magic attached to it that draws audiences of all ages.

How else can one explain the fact that he alone of all violinists playing in public today attracted a capacity audience to the Salle Wilfrid Pelletier, an audience that spilled onto the stage of the hall, and on the same evening that the McGill Chamber Orchestra was presenting the Bach Art of The Fugue before a capacity audience at the Theatre Maisonneuve.

And Menuhin chose a difficult program — one certainly not designed to appeal to a mass audience.

To be sure there were two Beethoven Sonatas and one of these was the ever popular Kreutzer Sonata. But the other was the difficult and demanding c minor Sonata, Op. 30, No. 2, which few artists dare to program in public.

And sandwiched between these two large works was the even more difficult Bartok Sonata for violin alone, a work that Menuhin commissioned some 30 years ago and was the first to play in public and record.

NO COMPROMISE

There were no compromises in the programming and there were no compromises in the playing.

We have all known for years that Menuhin sometimes has difficulty playing his chosen instrument. At no time last night did he attempt to disguise this fact. He could have chosen to alter his bowings to conceal a certain unsteadiness in his right arm. On the whole he did not.

Integrity of this kind can only be admired.

As for the performances — all three sonatas were played with a nobility and sensitivity that were as impressive and as heart-warming as ever. When Menuhin plays you listen to the music, not to the violin or the violinist.

The sound, as sweet as it may be, is always at the service of the composer and the ever-present sense of line holds the interest even in the most difficult moments. I have heard Menuhin give a more technically precise performance of the Bartok, but never one more totally committed to the design of the composer.

SIMPLICITY

The two Beethoven Sonatas were treated with a simplicity that made one feel that the composer would have applauded. Is there any more that need be said?

Hephzibah Menuhin, the violinist's sister, provided piano accompaniments that were not always in complete harmony, rhythmically speaking.

Meanwhile, the thought of missing the Art of the Fugue as performed by the McGill Chamber Orchestra was so depressing that I turned up at the dress rehearsal for the concert.

The ensemble on this occasion was drawn from many locales, with instrumentalists coming from Toronto, Ottawa and the United States to participate in the event. It is a credit to Alexander Brott that this group of players, assembled for this occasion only, should have sounded so homogenous and so completely at one with the music.

The arrangement used was that by Leonard Isaacs, one that is perhaps a bit too colorful in its contrasts of winds and strings. But Brott kept his players aware of the musical lines at all times and the performance at the dress rehearsal was unexceptionable.

Zappa and Mothers lumber along on cue

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

In his tenth year as leader of the Mothers of Invention, Frank Zappa keeps on truckin' his inspired avant-garde rock around for those who care to listen.

In the beginning, he vowed the Mothers would be bigger than the Beatles; it didn't quite turn out like that, but he has been just as influential in his own way. Many of the more than 8,000 fans who turned up at his Forum concert last night were devotees of the very slovenly heavy rock of which Zappa's heavily composed music is the antithesis — but they like him anyway.

He tells them weirdly scatological stories, then takes off with the band on long "fractured-jazz" convolutions.

The familiar style lumbered along on cue, yet the recently departed keyboardist George Duke and percussionist Ruth Underwood were ominous in their absence. The texture was clearly not as sharp and moving.

FRANK ZAPPA

Zappa alone

The new group consists of one of the original Mothers, bassist Roy Estrada (who had left in 1972), as well as vocalist-saxophonist Napoleon Murphy Brock, a mainstay of the recent brilliant recordings. Drummer Terry Bozio — who premiered on the latest album, Bongo Fury — and vocalist-alto saxophonist Norma Bell were suitably energetic, but keyboardist Andre Lewis was frequently redundant. No one in this band can give Zappa a run for his money in terms of technique, and the new edition of the Mothers suffers because of it.

They performed samplings from the entire Mothers' repertoire — from early anthems like Motherly Love (hairbrained madness that let Hollywood know the "underground" had surfaced) to recent elaborations on Dirty Love.

A new composition, Black Napkins, was indicative of the show's pace: An intriguing lyric and interesting tune evolved into a semi-structured series of solos that could hardly sustain interest before Zappa arrived with a brilliantly sputtering darting electric guitar solo.

He is one of rock's most intense instrumentalists (very much in the tradition of Jimi Hendrix). He is as dogged as he is methodical, exhibiting a hard-edge style dressed with countless quasi-flamenco curls. His forays would've been better served if they had come earlier, or if there was stronger support from the group.

If the musicianship is not blazing — as it has been over the past four years — neither does the comedy seem as crisp. However, it should be noted that the sound system was echoey and rhythm tensions tended to get muffled.

An added delight for the local audience was a guest appearance from Eddie Jobson, from Roxy Music, who played a plesigiass violin.

The opening act was Myles and Lenny, a slick new act from Toronto, featuring some cute rustic violin phrases.

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Winner of three Pulitzers, Thornton Wilder, 78, dies

THORNTON WILDER
. . . the bare essentials

HAMDEN, Conn. — (AP-UPI) — Thornton Wilder, who wrote the theatre classic Our Town and collected three Pulitzer prizes for his novels and plays, died Sunday of a heart attack at age 78.

The playwright, novelist and teacher died in his sleep at the Hamden, Conn., house he shared with his sister, Isabel, a family spokesman said.

Wilder won his first Pulitzer in 1928 for the novel The Bridge of San Luis Rey. The others were for the plays Our Town in 1938 and The Skin of Our Teeth in 1943. He also wrote The Matchmaker which was turned into Hello Dolly!, the longest running broadway musical.

His attitude tended to be Olympian, his writing simple and realistic, his stage settings stripped to bare essentials — a few chairs and a table.

"The whole purpose of literature," he said, "is the notation of the heart."

MICROCOSM

In Our Town he portrayed the life of a family in the town of Grover's Corners, N.H., a microcosm which could have been any small town in almost any country. Skin of Our Teeth is a satirical play about how the Antrobus family of Excelsior, N.J. survived the Ice Age.

Wilder wrote of Our Town that it "is not offered as a picture of life in a New Hampshire village . . . It is an attempt to find a value above all price for the small-lest events in our daily life. I have made the claim as preposterous as possible, for I have set the village against the largest dimensions of time and place."

In The Bridge of San Luis Rey, written in 1927, he examined what happens when people are brought together by chance as a result of catastrophe. It was widely acclaimed and brought him instant fame.

"Wars and human disasters come from the ugly unresolved things in us, just as earthquakes come from ugly unresolved things in nature, the cooling of the earth's crust," he said.

Wilder completed his last book Theophilus North in October, 1973.

Thornton Niven Wilder was born April 17, 1897, in Madison, Wis., the second of five children of Amos Wilder, editor of a newspaper. When he was nine, his father was named consul-general in Hong Kong and later Shanghai, and Wilder attended German and English schools in China.

DAPPER

Wilder, who never married, was a dapper dresser known for his charm and wit. He spoke French, Italian, German, Spanish and told an interviewer when he was 65 that he might just take up Russian.

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